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**Dec. 24, 2008  
PAO 12-24-08**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Home for the holidays – S.D. Guard experiences fewest number of  
deployed members in recent years**

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CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo – Santa Claus may not be the only red symbol flying through the skies of Kosovo this Christmas season, as the red cross of a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter from the South Dakota Army National Guard can also be seen shining out as a beacon of hope.

Twenty-one members from Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment will be spending their holiday providing medical evacuation support for service members supporting the Kosovo Stabilization Force.

As the Rapid City based medical unit is helping to provide the gift of life for anyone who falls under their care, their brothers and sisters in arms at home are also experiencing a gift not typical for the organization in which they serve; a Christmas with their families.

For the first time in nearly five years, the South Dakota National Guard is experiencing the fewest number of deployed Soldiers and Airmen over the holiday season, with only about 40 members serving in various locations throughout Southwest Asia and Europe.

“Anytime we can have families together over the holiday season is a wonderful thing, especially with our current operations tempo,” said Maj. Gen. Steven Doohen, the adjutant general for the South Dakota National Guard.

Having only 40 members deployed this year is a noticeably small number for the South Dakota National Guard. Along with Company C, only one other unit is deployed. The S.D. Embedded Training Team “Coyote One” with its 16 members is completing its mission in Afghanistan and is expected home in the coming weeks. There are also a few individual South Dakota National Guard members currently serving at various locations in Southwest Asia this holiday season.

The decrease in numbers of deployed members is not typical for this time of year. Since the beginning of the Iraq war in 2003, the South Dakota National Guard has had many units deployed during the holiday season – averaging anywhere from 2-11 units and 350-800 service members over the last five years.

“We’ve historically had a vastly larger number of service members deployed this time of year,” said Maj. Orson Ward, public affairs officer. “Our largest deployments have been during the Christmas of 2003, where we had more than 700 service members deployed, and the Christmas of 2004 with nearly 800 service members serving overseas.”

“The National Guard has transformed from a strategic reserve to an operational force,” said Doohen. “The South Dakota National Guard has earned a reputation over the years as being the go-to state when they need something done right the first time.”

The South Dakota Guard has consistently ranked among the top 10 of all 54 U.S. states and territories in number of deployed units and members per capita. But the recent shift in numbers, however, has less to do with being a gift from Uncle Sam and more with unit location in the rotation model.

“The reason we have such a fewer number of deployed service members this year is because of how our units are falling into the Army Force Generation Model, rather than a decrease for the need of forces in Iraq and Afghanistan,” said Ward.

The Army Force Generation Model, or ARFORGEN, directly supports the active duty Army’s new force structure and is designed to achieve a sustained, more predictable posture to generate trained and ready forces. The model is designed so National Guard and Reserve forces can expect to deploy for up to a year once every five years, bringing more predictability to Soldiers, their families and their employers.

The Air National Guard, similarly, has its own rotation model reflective of the active component’s need to sustain operations overseas.

At present, this year’s decrease in numbers of deployed members is something of a gift for members and their families, but it won’t be too long before the Guard is reminded of Christmases past and what to expect for the future.

“We had a tremendous commitment of forces early in 2003 and 2004, and now we are seeing units resetting for future deployments,” said Ward. “We expect this break in rotations to fade as we are anticipating another round of heavy deployments, with more than 900 Soldiers and 500 Airmen deploying over the next two years.”

“Considering what the future has in store for the Guard, we are so very thankful to have the majority of our service members home this year,” said Doohen. “It’s great that our organization can take this opportunity to spend time and cherish the things that mean the most to us; our families.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact Maj. Orson Ward at (605) 737-6721, cell (605) 431-8753, or e-mail [orson.ward@us.army.mil](mailto:orson.ward@us.army.mil).



**Photo cutline:** (Clockwise from upper left) Capt. Michael McDaniel, Chief Warrant Officer John Wurtz, Sgt. Jared Sampson and Sgt. Shad Tenold from Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment, of Rapid City, South Dakota Army National Guard, prepare for a mission in their UH-60 Black Hawk medical evacuation helicopter in support of the Kosovo Stabilization Force on July 2, 2008, from Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo. (Army National Guard photo)(Released)

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